



SUMMER 2012



Destination: Afghanistan

Six NJDOC Employees Deployed Together in Support of Operation Enduring Freedom

When reservists from the 177th Fighter Wing of the New Jersey Air National Guard in Atlantic City were deployed to Afghanistan last winter in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, six members of the group could take solace in the fact that their time overseas was being spent with co-workers. Each of the six is employed by the New Jersey Department of Corrections.

"We didn't see each other every day [in Afghanistan], but we'd run into one another at least a few times a week," said Michele Graiff, a senior correction officer at Bayside State Prison. "It was comforting, because we've been around each other for so long that, in some ways, we're like a family."



Gathered at the 177th Fighter Wing of the New Jersey Air National Guard in Atlantic City are (from left) Senior Airman Cory Nichols, Technical Sergeant Michele Graiff, Senior Airman Steve Moore and Senior Master Sergeant Jim McCloskey.

The group also included Sergeant Gerard Sheehan of the Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center; Sergeant Jim McCloskey of Garden State Youth Correctional Facility; SCO Steve Moore of South Woods State Prison; and SCOs Cory Nichols and Jorge Gonzalez of Southern State Correction Facility.

The reservists quickly learned that the assumption of a typical desert climate throughout the year all across Afghanistan is inaccurate. Weather conditions at the Bagram Air Field, where they were stationed, were snowy, damp and bitter cold.

"Most days, it was warm enough that some of the ice on the ground would melt into the mud," reported Nichols, who was joined by Graiff, Moore and McCloskey on an April Sunday morning at the military base, located by the Atlantic City Airport.

"There were times when you'd spend the whole day shoveling snow and breaking ice," he continued. "Then everything would freeze at night, and you'd have to repeat the same thing the next day."

Added McCloskey: "We stayed in tents and shipping containers. You'd be lying in bed, freezing cold, and you might ask yourself if what you're doing is worth it. That was when you needed to think about the big picture."

There was a time when joining the National Guard essentially required a commitment of one weekend per month and two weeks per year. However, those days abruptly ended on September 11, 2001.

"When I first signed up more than 11 years ago, I'll admit I was kind of scared by the idea of going to war," Nichols said. "If I knew there was a good chance I'd be deployed overseas, I probably wouldn't have signed up at the time. Then 9/11 happened, and everything changed. But after my first deployment, which was in Iraq, I realized it was something I could do. Then my whole mindset changed."

As Nichols spoke, Graiff, who joined the National Guard 12 years ago, nodded in agreement.

"I didn't really have an appreciation for what I'd be doing, but as time goes by, I've come to understand the cause," she said. "The bottom line is, you go where you're needed and do what has to be done."

Often, overseas deployments are what have to be done, which means leaving workplace, friends and loved ones behind for long periods of time for destinations such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Qatar. Although the reservists are not on the front lines, the base that becomes their home away from home during deployments can be targeted for attack at any time.

Furthermore, in today's all-volunteer military, multiple deployments have become facts of life for reservists.

"We understand the expectations, and we're here because we choose to be here," said McCloskey, now in his 18th year in the National Guard. "It's a mix of things. It's the financial and educational benefits. It's job fulfillment. And, of course, it's patriotism.

"In the military, we all have specialties. If you demonstrate potential in a certain area, they're going to draw it out of you and give you a chance to utilize those skills. When you go overseas and do what you've been trained to do, it's incredibly satisfying. With the places we've been and the things we've been taught, we've built up our resumes to a degree that none of us ever could have imagined."

In contrast to his more seasoned colleagues, Moore didn't join the National Guard until three years ago, at age 31. By then, he'd already earned a master's degree in criminal justice. One of the primary reasons he enlisted is that it will enable him to utilize the GI Bill to attend law school once he concludes his career with the Department of Corrections.

Like the others, he has no regrets.

"You feel like you're doing something that truly matters," said Moore, who recently was offered a job in his specialty – logistics – based on his status as a veteran and his knowledge of that field. "That's why you're willing deal with the snow and the cold in Afghanistan and the 130-degree temperatures in Iraq, which has dust storms and the largest bugs you'll ever see.

"What keeps you going is that people are so grateful and have so much respect for you. People you know and even strangers thank you all the time. That's important, because we take a great deal of pride in what we do."

The reservists are convinced that their experiences in the military also have been beneficial to their jobs as correctional officers.

"There is a carryover in the way we handle different situations," McCloskey related. "The military people I've worked with don't overwhelm easily, and they always present themselves as true professionals. I don't think that's a coincidence."

McCloskey, Nichols and Graiff all have re-enlisted at least once and reported that they are strongly considering doing so again when faced with that decision.

"Serving your country is such a unique experience on so many levels," Graiff concluded. "While I understand this isn't for everybody, I believe that someone who's never been in the military is missing out. I feel honored to have had this opportunity."





SUMMER 2012



Mr. President

Assistant Superintendent at ADTC Heads Youth Basketball Program

Steve Johnson's idea of leisure is to make sure more than 1,600 basketball-playing boys and girls, grades 3-12, are properly accommodated.

Yet before the games even begin, competitive teams must be formed, gyms must be reserved, practices must be coordinated, and schedules must be formulated. Coaches and scorekeepers need to be recruited. And, of course, there are no games without referees.

Leisure? Welcome to Steve Johnson's world.

Johnson, assistant superintendent of the Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center, can be found most days at the Special Treatment Unit, which he supervises. When he's not on the job, however, Johnson is likely spending time in his capacity as president of the Marlboro Basketball Association, a position he has held for three years. Despite the substantial commitment that position requires, he still finds time to coach three different teams – 10- and 12-year-old boys and 11-year-old girls.



Steve Johnson poses with the Marlboro Basketball Association's girls' 11-year-old traveling team, one of three squads he coaches.

"I went to school to be a teacher, but I ended up not teaching," Johnson related. "I love basketball, and I enjoy teaching the game to the kids. Obviously, the games are fun, but the truth is, I enjoy the practices more than the games. That's when you really have an opportunity to teach."

Like most of his fellow volunteers, Johnson was drawn into the program to serve as a coach for his children. That was a decade ago. Although neither daughter Melissa nor son Steve remain in the program, Dad has never been more deeply involved.

"I wouldn't have thought I'd continue after my kids moved on, but my wife probably could have told you I would," Johnson said, chuckling. "I do it because I honestly can't think of a better way to spend my time than to work with the town's young people in an activity like basketball."

The seeds for Johnson's ascension into his current role were planted six years ago, when he was appointed to the board of the basketball association. One of his primary responsibilities is finding quality coaches for the many teams that participate in the program. Quality, he emphasized, is not determined by winning percentage.

"Every year, we evaluate our coaches, and we bring coaches back based on performance," he explained. "Wins and losses are not how coaches are graded."

"We max out at nine kids per team," Johnson continued. "Coaches are told that their evaluations will be based on whether players seven, eight and nine [in terms of ability] come back. It's not that we don't care about players one through three, but we can be pretty sure they're coming back. It's players seven, eight and nine that we don't know about. This is very much their league. We understand they're not likely to become high school basketball players, but we want them to be able to learn, play, socialize and have fun."

The rules are structured so that every player must play at least 50 percent of the game. Johnson understands that coaches tend to put their best players on the floor in the final few minutes of a game, but in doing so, the 50-percent rule cannot be compromised.

"It's a tremendous commitment to be a coach," he said. "You have to be responsible, cooperative, flexible and understanding. Most important, you have to be out there for the best interests of the kids."

The same standard also holds true for everyone else associated with the Marlboro Basketball Association. That's why all players and parents, as well as coaches, are required to sign a code of conduct.

"It basically says that our objective is to let players play, coaches coach and referees officiate," Johnson pointed out. "If someone goes over the line, we take it very seriously."

As president of the basketball association, preparations for the beginning of the season commence approximately two months in advance. Each player is evaluated, and teams are formed with the idea of making the squads as evenly matched as possible. Even more daunting is scheduling. With as many as seven gyms at a time in use during the season, designing a workable schedule can be, well, frustrating.

"You find out that on a certain date, you can't play here because of a PTA meeting, you can't play there due to a Halloween party, and you can't play over there because of a holiday gift event," Johnson said. "The schools are extremely cooperative, so you don't want to be a burden, but it's not an easy job scheduling games for 1,600 kids. There have been times when I've been up until one o'clock in the morning trying to figure things out."

Once the teams are formed, and the schedule is unscrambled, Johnson and company need to find a coach for every team. In some ways, that is the most challenging task of all.

"I tell them flat-out that if we can't find enough volunteers to coach these teams, then we're going to need to cut down on the number of players who are allowed to play," Johnson said. "That's the last thing anyone wants."

Johnson's need to recruit doesn't end once the coaching vacancies are filled. He is well aware of the importance of finding the right successor. The coming season will be his last one as president – although he will continue to coach – and he feels an obligation to leave the association in capable hands.

"You need people who are invested," he reported. "I certainly didn't create this program; I inherited it. And I understand the importance of having good people in place.

"The New Jersey Department of Corrections trains you on how to be an effective leader, and I've been fortunate to be able to apply the leadership skills I've learned to the basketball program. Your job is to train the people

who are going to follow you. That's how the jail administration works, and that's how the basketball program needs to work. You don't want the program to suffer just because one person leaves."

In Johnson's case, that one person has been so effective in his role that the Marlboro Mayor's Office and Town Council named him its Volunteer of the Year. In 2009, Johnson received that award not only for overseeing the basketball program but for introducing the Charity Coaches Game and Youth Skills Competition, an annual event in which all proceeds go to a local charity. The 2012 event was held March 16, and more than \$2,300 was raised for this year's charity, the Marlboro and Morganville First Aid Squad.

"We're lucky to have a lot of committed volunteers in our community, but the decision to choose Steve to receive the award was a no-brainer," said Marlboro Mayor Jonathan Hornik. "He's been an essential part of our basketball program and rec operation for a long time, but that's only part of the story. Steve is selfless, approachable and always on top of whatever needs to be done. To me, he's a friend as well as a resource that has made my time as mayor so much easier than it otherwise would have been."

Despite his crowded schedule, Johnson still finds time to further satisfy his passion for basketball by officiating high school games.

"It's so rewarding to have a chance to watch kids continue to develop as players once they leave the [Marlboro Basketball Association] program," he said. "I officiated a game last season and had kids from both teams greeting me before the game. The other official asked me what was going on, and I told him I had coached some of these kids since they were in third grade. To me, that's what it's all about."





SUMMER 2012



Keep on Truckin'

Vehicle Overtakes, but NJDOC Officers Come to the Rescue

It was a wintry evening in early January, and by the time Senior Correction Officer Robert Troche had finished agency training with a group of recruits, it had been dark for at least an hour. As he climbed into his vehicle, Troche, a member of the custody staff at the Central Reception and Assignment Facility (CRAF), knew it was after 6 p.m. and assumed he was about to quietly begin his weekend.



Correction Officer Recruit Edward Lester (left) and Senior Correction Officer Robert Troche come together on the Fallen Officers Memorial, located on the grounds of the New Jersey Department of Corrections' Central office headquarters.

So much for assumptions.

At the intersection of Parkway Avenue and Lower Ferry Road, barely five minutes from CRAF, Troche came upon a pickup truck on its side. The underside of the vehicle was facing oncoming traffic. There were no police present, so Troche correctly assumed the accident had just happened.

"In a situation like that, you don't have time to come up with a complicated plan of action," he said. "You more or less react. I parked, stepped out of my vehicle and started making

Photo by Scott Franks

my way toward the truck. When I turned around to make sure my car was in a safe place, I saw somebody else in blue running toward me.”

That turned out to be Correction Officer Recruit Edward Lester, who like Troche, had been taking part in agency training at CRAF.

“I wanted to try to help in any way I could,” said Lester, a member of State Basic Correction Officer Training, Class 225. Incidentally, the incident occurred almost two weeks before Lester and his classmates were scheduled to graduate.

When the two officers reached the pickup truck, they discovered that its driver and lone occupant, a man who appeared to be in his 60s, was conscious. Although the occupant had managed to wiggle free of his seat belt, he was unable to remove himself from the vehicle. Lester acted quickly and decisively, climbing on top of the truck, opening the door and lowering himself into the cab. Once inside, he was able to boost the driver toward the door, where Troche and a handful of others who had since stopped to assist, managed to remove him.

“We were concerned that something might happen to the vehicle, so we were moving as fast as we could,” Troche recalled. “The driver was pretty shaken, but he was aware of what was happening, and once we got him out of the vehicle, he was able to walk. He knew we were there to help, and he was grateful.

“By the time we were able to remove him from the truck, there were six people helping out, and four of the six were Department of Corrections employees,” he continued. “Officer Lester and I have talked about that, and it’s something that makes both of us proud.”

Neither Troche nor Lester left until police arrived and took control of the accident scene.

During a graduation rehearsal for Class 225, held approximately a week after the incident, a commendation Lester had received for his actions was read aloud. However, Lester downplayed the attention.

“I wouldn’t say we did anything heroic,” Lester said. “I would hope that if I was in a position where I needed assistance, someone would be willing to help.”





SUMMER 2012



Partners

NJDOC Inmates Help the Lions Club Put the World in Focus

In its quest to give the gift of sight to people across the globe, Lions Clubs International, the largest service club organization in the world, has an unlikely partner – the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC).

Throughout the years, this partnership has afforded countless numbers of NJDOC inmates with the opportunity to contribute to society in a tangible way through their work on behalf of the New Jersey Lions Club.

"The eyeglass recycling project is one of very few programs that provides inmates with a sense of giving back," said Warren Murray, a senior vocational counselor at the Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center (ADTC). "The work that they do is something they can actually see, something that benefits others."

The recycling program involves inmates preparing used eyeglasses for distribution to men, women and children in underprivileged countries throughout the world. The preparation process involves washing the glasses in a special cleaning solution; reading the prescription of the glasses on a



Mirick Payne, an inmate at Mountainview Youth Correctional Facility, works in the optical lab.

Photo by Allen Trach

piece of equipment called a lensometer; and preparing the glasses for shipment.

In 1999, ADTC became the first state correctional facility to become involved with the eyeglass recycling project. Murray, who supervises the program, estimates that since its inception, ADTC has processed more than a million pairs of donated eyeglasses. With a staff of six inmates, the facility currently processes about 60,000 glasses annually.

Training for the program, which mostly utilizes long-term inmates, is extensive.

"Reading the lenses of the glasses is very involved," stated William Hauck, administrator of Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women. "If the inmates don't have a steady hand and pay careful attention to what they are doing, they will never get a true, accurate reading."

Edna Mahan's involvement with the eyeglass recycling project began 10 years ago. To date, the facility has processed more than 700,000 glasses. Like ADTC, Edna Mahan processes approximately 60,000 glasses each year.

"The inmates have really bought into the program," Hauck said. "They know they're helping unfortunate people across the world. It amazes them that people from developing countries walk for miles and stand in line for hours to get glasses, especially glasses they have prepared for use."

The reason the eyeglasses collected in New Jersey are sent abroad and not distributed throughout the United States is a matter of liability. With the exception of just a few states, Lions Clubs International is not immune from the potential liability associated with providing people with used eyeglasses in this country. However, in developing nations desperately in need of the aid that the organization provides with used eyeglasses, used hearing aids and other services, liability is not a concern.

The latest NJDOC institution to become part of this endeavor is Mountainview Youth Correctional Facility. The program at Mountainview, which began in the summer of 2009, is smaller in scale than those at ADTC and Edna Mahan and processes an estimated 36,000 glasses a year.

Eyeglasses are donated from a variety of sources, but most of them come from people across the state. There are drop-off sites in numerous public

venues, including libraries.

The Lions Club also makes it convenient for state employees to donate glasses. During the month of May, a campaign takes place where Lions Club recycling boxes and receptacles are placed in state offices and institutions throughout New Jersey, including the NJDOC.

Once eyeglasses have been processed at the various NJDOC institutions, Lions Club volunteers pick them up and deliver the glasses to the New Jersey Eyeglass Recycling Center, located at the Katzenbach School for the Deaf in West Trenton. From there, the eyeglasses make their way abroad on mission trips with optometrists and other medical professionals.

"The program doesn't cost the department anything," noted Hauck. "The Lions Club delivers the glasses to us and does all the transporting back down to West Trenton. They provide the lensometers and all of the necessary supplies."

While students from the Katzenbach School also process eyeglasses for the recycling program, the NJDOC processing labs are the only other centers in the state. Inmates from the three participating prisons process the vast majority of the eyeglasses that are transported from New Jersey to those in need in foreign countries.

"When you realize the glasses that our inmates work on are going to people that never had glasses, can't afford glasses and for the first time can read or can even see, it's an incredible thing," Murray concluded. "It's powerful."





SUMMER 2012



The Write Way

Professor from Drew University Brings 'Poetic Justice' to Edna Mahan

Even after a fellow inmate persuaded Vanessa Manley to sign up for "Poetic Justice," a weekly class offered at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women and taught by a Drew University professor, she was skeptical that the class would be of any help.

"Put it this way," Manley explained, "I have severe trust issues."

According to instructor Rosemary McGee, who volunteers her time and skills at the prison, "Poetic Justice" is designed to teach participants to understand the correlations between stress and physical maladies and to use writing as a tool to relieve stress.



Rosemary McGee, a Drew University professor who volunteers as an instructor at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women, interacts with "Poetic Justice" students (from left) Patrina Crawford, Melissa Solis and Maria Rivera.

One of McGee's students, Jamillah Fullman, felt strongly that the class benefited her, and she believed it could do the same for Manley.

"Jamillah told me to try it out and see how it is," Manley said, "but even after I signed up, I wasn't sure if it was something really I wanted to do. At first, I didn't write, but then I started to evolve. I saw that everybody in the class was forthcoming and that they were interested in what the others were saying and feeling. Eventually, I'd write, but I didn't share what I wrote. Now, when I write about what's going on in my life, about the things that cause me to be stressed out, I'll share it, and I actually find that comforting."

McGee, who received a doctorate in medical humanities from Drew University, teaches a graduate class at Drew titled "Poverty, Stress and Health." She utilizes many of the elements from that class during her weekly interactions with the women at Edna Mahan.

"Above all, this experience has taught me that we're all basically the same," said McGee, who had never taught a class in the prison before she began volunteering at Edna Mahan in October 2011. "We're all human beings, and we all have issues. Some of the decisions these women have made have gotten them incarcerated, which is unfortunate, but at the core of it, they're smart, and they're creative. I'm gratified to have had this opportunity to work with them."

McGee generally begins each class with a discussion that focuses on topics ranging from housing to food to socio-economic issues. She often distributes handouts related to the topic of the day. She then gives the inmates a writing assignment, due the following week, based on the discussion.

The instructor encourages women at Edna Mahan to express themselves in whatever style and format they find most comfortable.

"Some write poetry, others write essays, and a few others sort of mix it up," said McGee, whose career focus has been helping women. "To me, what matters is that their feelings come from the heart."

"What really impresses me is that the women are willing to take risks," she continued. "Recently, one of the women wrote something that was, well, raw. She was somewhat apprehensive about reading it aloud, because she didn't want to be offensive to any of the other woman. But with a little bit of encouragement, she read it, and it was profound. It cut through all of the surface pettiness and got right to the core of her main issue. It was a beautiful piece of writing."

McGee doesn't collect the assignments or grade the writing in terms of grammar, punctuation or sentence structure.

"What matters to me is content," she said. "In that sense, these women continue to grow as writers."

In doing so, they grow as communicators.

"It's not just the writing. Ms. McGee has helped us to enhance our interpersonal skills," Kim Harko said. "That's so important, because those are skills we're going to need for the rest of our lives."

Classmate Eva Goldsboro, seated opposite Harko at a table in the library at Edna Mahan, nodded in agreement.

"At first, it was real hard," she admitted. "A lot of the things I wrote about, particularly my kids, were so emotional for me that I'd have to get somebody else to read my assignments to the others. But after a while, I was strong enough to read what I wrote without crying. I'm grateful to have discovered that inner strength, and I'm grateful to be able to express what I'm going through and what I'm feeling."

The women are well aware that the skills they have developed – trust, communication, inner strength – will be critical once they complete their sentences.

Declared Melissa Solis: "This class has taught me that I have the ability – that all of us have the ability – to become productive members of society once we leave here."





SUMMER 2012



History Buff

NJSP Lieutenant Digs Deep Behind 'The Wall'

Escape attempts, sentry boxes, Egyptian revival architecture, and officer rosters and oaths of office that date back to the 1800s.

These are just a few things from the past at the forefront of Lieutenant Wayne Sanderson's mind when it comes to New Jersey State Prison (NJSP).

"I've always been a student of American history," said the 23-year veteran of the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC), who has worked at NJSP since 1995. "The more I worked at Trenton, the more fascinated I became with the place. You can't work in a place like that without seeing the little historic nooks and crannies."

What started out last fall as a study of his family tree quickly evolved into an extensive research project on the oldest correctional facility in the state.

"When I found out that I had a relative who worked at the prison, I really started to look at the late 1800s very closely," Sanderson recalled.

With the help of online genealogical resources, old directories from the City of Trenton, newspaper databases and NJSP records on file at the state archives, Sanderson discovered a cousin five times removed, who worked at the prison from 1877 until the mid-1890s.



Lieutenant Wayne H. Sanderson holds oaths of office belonging to a distant cousin who worked at New Jersey State Prison in the late 1800s.

"I would encourage people to look into their family tree," he related. "You never know what you are going to find. I was looking into where my family came from and found that my family's been exactly where I am," stated Sanderson, chuckling.

Another relative of Sanderson – his grandfather's uncle – also worked at NJSP. His career dates back to the 1930s and includes a period of service at East Jersey State Prison following his return from World War II.

Relatives in blue are not all that Sanderson discovered during his research, which has consumed an average of three hours per night of his time since January.

Around the 118th anniversary of the 1894 murder of NJDOC fallen officer James Lippincott, who coincidentally the lieutenant found to be another distant cousin, Sanderson inadvertently stumbled upon a significant find. As he researched Deputy Keeper Lippincott, Sanderson came across Eli Stetser – a NJDOC fallen officer, who has never been memorialized within the department.

"When I started searching, one of the things that came up was 'deputy state prison keeper murdered in 1913,'" Sanderson related. "However, according to departmental records, there was nobody killed in 1913. The NJDOC memorial wall at Central Office skips from 1894 to 1928. So I started researching, and that's how I found Eli Stetser. It turns out they missed one."

With thorough detective work, Sanderson learned that Deputy Keeper Stetser had indeed lost his life in the line of duty. During an escape attempt by two inmates, the 27-year veteran of NJSP was shot and killed on September 21, 1913.

Shortly thereafter, Sanderson uncovered other NJDOC fallen officers who have also gone unacknowledged.

"After I found Stetser," Sanderson said, "I figured if he could fall through the cracks, then the cracks are probably wide enough for more. I started sorting through old newspaper articles, and I found more guys that qualify to be memorialized as fallen officers."

In addition to Stetser, Jacob Van Houten, William Hemsing, Edward McManus, John Fitzgerald and Daniel Walsh, can each be added to the list of forgotten fallen officers. The officers served at Trenton until the end of their watches, which occurred from 1896 to 1924.

However, Sanderson's research didn't end with the six NJSP officers. He subsequently came across two other line-of-duty deaths that have gone unrecorded in departmental records. Joseph Martin of East Jersey State Prison died in November 1908, and Dean Evans died in July 1978 during an

altercation with an inmate at the Bordentown Reformatory, now known as Albert C. Wagner Youth Correctional Facility.

"It's been like a second job over the last several months, but I think that I've sifted out all of the fallen officers that I'm likely to find," related Sanderson.

In the wake of his exhaustive research on the fallen officers he has discovered, Sanderson submitted official recommendations to the NJDOC requesting that the officers be memorialized.

As a result, all of the NJSP officers have recently been added to the Officer Down Memorial Page (ODMP), which is dedicated to honoring the thousands of American law enforcement officers who have given their lives in the line of duty since the 1790s. The ODMP application for the last two NJDOC officers is currently pending.

In addition to the ODMP tribute, the NJDOC will also pay homage to the fallen officers who have been discovered by Sanderson and verified by ODMP. Commissioner Gary Lanigan has directed the Office of the Chief of Staff to have the names of the officers placed on the NJDOC's Fallen Officers' Memorial Wall. A ceremony to commemorate the eight officers is being planned for later this year.

Sanderson continues his quest for other tidbits of NJSP history, however.

"Trenton just gets inside you, and it's infectious," he reflected. "There's a lot of heritage here. There have been generations of people who wore the uniform and stood post. It's the culture, the traditions and the feeling that what we do makes a real difference. It's a hard job, but it's a job worth doing.

"Sadly, the history attached to the prison has evaporated and been lost over the decades," he added. "As people have retired and died, and records been misplaced or destroyed, we've been left with very little. But if you dig deeply enough, you can find echoes from the past here and there.

"There's no telling what might still be at Trenton."





SUMMER 2012



On the Move

Central Transportation Unit Logs Thousands of Miles

At 4 o'clock in the morning, when most Central Office employees are catching their last few hours of ZZZ's, the shift commander for the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) Central Transportation Unit is on grounds and gearing up for a day that is sure to be like no other.

"It's a very busy, high-speed unit," said Major Joseph Polyi, who has headed Central 'Trans' since early December. "There's never really a slow day. We have some better days than others, but every day is pretty busy. We move a lot of inmates, and we put on a lot of miles."

Polyi is no stranger to Central Trans, having worked in the unit in a variety of capacities during his 22-year plus career with the NJDOC. He brings to his



Major Joseph Polyi and members of the NJDOC Central Transportation Unit.

Photo by: Scott Franks

current Central Trans position experience as a senior correction officer on the unit for four years, a sergeant on the late desk and a north regional supervisor.

Comprised of 124 officers, eight support staff and two property truck drivers, Central Trans has existed since 1986.

The unit transports roughly 4,800 inmates a month. Transports include court appearances, medical appointments, transfers between NJDOC institutions, halfway house placements and transfers of state-sentenced inmates to and from county jail facilities. In all, Central Trans logs more than 150,000 miles per month.

Making it happen every day, are crews from all three regions of the state – north, central and south New Jersey. Each morning, the crews make their way from various NJDOC facilities to their regional 'hub.' Albert C. Wagner Youth Correctional Facility in Bordentown is considered by Central Trans to be the main hub.

"We pick up in all the areas, and we'll meet in Bordentown," Polyi related. "We will switch trips out there, and everyone will go their separate ways. The amount of coordination is incredible, because we have to keep track of all the inmates we have out."

Added Patti Gaskill, who has been with Central Trans since its inception, "The shift commander knows everything. In the midst of all the different trips that are scheduled, he has to take into consideration traffic, vehicle breakdowns and a situation in an institution that might hold up a trip from getting out. Everything has to be coordinated to get the inmates where they need to go, reasonably close to the time that they're supposed to be there.

"The dance that takes place within the unit in order to be able to take all the trips that we receive, put them on paper as a schedule, and make them happen safely in the midst of time constraints and fiscal challenges is phenomenal," Gaskill continued.

"I don't think you could find a harder working person in the department than the guy running the desk," stated Polyi. "It's nonstop radio calls, nonstop phone calls, keeping track of what crew went where, where crews currently are, and whether or not court is clear or medical appointments over."

Contrary to what many unfamiliar with the inner workings of Central Trans believe, the unit does not have transportation crews on standby awaiting assignments.

"Every day, we have a booked schedule that is usually 10 or 11 pages, with no room for anything else," Polyi said.

For Polyi, there is a vast difference between Central Transportation and working in the institutions.

"We deal with all the county sheriff's departments, medical agencies and the Administrative Office of the Courts," he related. "We receive calls from judges, prosecutors and a lot of outside agencies that officers inside the prison don't deal with. Plus, because we are spread throughout the state and are very mobile, dealing with staff and trying to get things out to our officers is a lot more difficult. We may not see people for a month at a time."

In order to become part of Central Trans, an officer must be with the NJDOC for three years.

"We are looking for punctual, flexible and hard-working people," Polyi stated. "A sharp uniform is also a must, because we are out in the public eye. We definitely need people who do not use a lot of sick time. If I have to move 150 inmates and an officer calls out sick, I still have to move 150 inmates."

"An officer who's dedicated to his job and who is going to come in and give 100 percent every day is the kind of officer needed in Central Trans," said Senior Correction Officer Dennis Rivera, a 15-year veteran of the NJDOC, who has been part of the unit for four years. "Every day is different. Nothing is the same."

At 7:30 p.m., hours after most Central Office employees have left for home, the process of closing down the Central Trans desk nears completion. Every crew, every inmate, and every van and bus is accounted for.

And the next day – less than nine hours away – it will be time to do it all over again.





SUMMER 2012



A Major Shift

An Incident? Central Operations Desk Has Become Department's Go-To Source

The phones are ringing, and the Central Operations Desk (COD) is bustling this Tuesday morning as Majors James Keil and Stephen Magpiong field the calls, which today range from a lost employee ID card to a disabled NJDOC van carrying 10 inmates to a work detail.

On January 4, 2012, Deputy Commissioner Mark Farsi revamped the way noteworthy occurrences within the department are reported to Senior and Executive Staff by establishing the Central Operations Desk, located on the grounds of the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) Central Office headquarters and staffed by six correction majors. A 24/7 unit, the COD coordinates all emergency situations and unusual incidents that transpire in the department.



Major James Keil is among those who staff the Central Operations Desk.

Photo by Scott Franks

Based on the Incident Command Structure Model, the COD receives and logs information about significant events, reporting each incident through the chain of command and serving as the liaison between

Central Office and the NJDOC facilities.

"In a 24-hour period, we receive about 35 or more calls," Magpiong remarks, "with 911 calls being the most prevalent."

Adds Keil: "The response to a situation is coordinated through this office. For instance, an institution will call us for the Special Operations Group (SOG) to help with a search or to provide exterior lighting in the event of a power outage."

Before the COD was established, an administrator would have to call a director, who would have to call SOG to respond. The COD has streamlined that process, saving valuable time in the event of an emergency situation.

"The COD is an excellent safety net, and if a lieutenant has a question, we can give direction as needed in real time," Keil states. "In addition, the COD allows for departmental resources to be handled in the most efficient possible way."

There are 33 different categories of reportable events, to include fires, disturbances, assaults and significant contraband finds, among others. Each category has automatic delivery to the proper groups, be it Executive Staff, Senior Staff or whichever group has been designated by the internal COD management procedures.

At the end of every shift, an Incident Summary Report is forwarded to the Executive Staff, which then discusses the report at its morning meetings. It is the duty of the COD major to review all previous logs and ensure that pending logs are updated as needed. Depending on the event, as many as a dozen updates can be attached to any incident.

A truck recently hit a telephone pole on the grounds of the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women, causing power outages to many of the minimum housing units and administration buildings. Eleven updates, including those dealing with the restoration of power and telephones, were reported in real time, and the proper resources, to include SOG, were sent to the institution -- proof yet again that the COD streamlines the process.

Also the keepers of the institutional census reports, COD can determine quickly where there are available beds, housing and detention, so that at a moment's notice an administrator has the ability to shift inmates to another institution -- a valuable resource, especially in an emergent situation.

"Checking bed statuses, based on the institutional counts, is an integral part of this job," Major Keil states.

Whether it is an inmate death, SOG searches or even a power failure, the Central Operations Desk has become the go-to source, Keil notes, adding that, "the COD has the ability to provide a direct response when managing an emergency, utilizing more of a hands-on approach."





SUMMER 2012



In the Event of an Emergency...

Woman Requires Medical Attention; NJDOC Staff Reacts Quickly

June 13 was a beautiful, bright, unseasonably warm day for so early in the summer. Hundreds of friends, relatives and New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) staff were gathered in the Patriots Theater at the War Memorial in Trenton, as it was graduation day for Basic Course for State Correction Officers, Class 226.

Lieutenant Governor Kim Guadagno, introduced by NJDOC Commissioner Gary Lanigan, had concluded her keynote speech, and commendations were being presented, when Senior Corrections Officer Ronald Sost, SCO Keila Kyle and NJDOC civilian employee Scott Franks realized that one of the attendees, seated in a wheelchair in the front row, was in the midst of a medical emergency.

"She had blood pressure issues, and I realized that the excitement, and not eating, was a perfect recipe for disaster. I instructed staff to call paramedics immediately."

"I was standing behind her when I noticed this woman's hand, which had been holding her head, twitching," said Kyle, a staff member at the Correctional Staff Training Academy.

Sost, a 30-year volunteer firefighter and EMT, was seated behind the victim and sprung up as soon as he saw her slump over in her chair.

"I saw the family members trying to wake her up, identified myself as an EMT and asked them for the woman's medical history," related Sost, a member of the custody staff at Albert C. Wagner Youth Correctional Facility.

Franks, who often can be found with a camera at departmental functions – quite a change from his regular duties with the Fleet Management Unit – said, “Interestingly enough, we had been chatting earlier outside [the War Memorial], and I saw her again in the theater taking pictures. I became concerned because she was breathing heavily and was perspiring a great deal, and I saw her put the camera down. I thought perhaps she had a stroke. I looked around, and Officer Sost had jumped up.”

Checking her vital signs, Sost realized the victim was barely responsive.

“I knew we had to get her into another room to work on her, as she was semi-conscious,” he said.

At least 10 NJDOC staff members assisted in taking the woman into the foyer and getting her out of her wheelchair, while Sost attended to her.

Meanwhile, Kyle managed to talk to the woman, who had regained consciousness.

“She had been up early and been rushing around, excited about the graduation of her nephew, and she hadn’t eaten,” she reported. “She told me she had blood pressure issues, and I realized that the excitement, and not eating, was a perfect recipe for disaster. I instructed staff to call paramedics immediately.”

When the paramedics arrived, members of NJDOC staff helped place the woman in the ambulance.

So speedy and professional was the response to this urgent situation that most audience members didn’t realize there was a problem. 